It’s finally here! Opening Day of baseball season will be off and running on March 26th, 2020, and I can’t wait. Once again, we’ll try to answer Abbott and Costello’s timeless question, “Who’s on first?” (If you don’t know the reference, you owe it to yourself to look it up.) I don’t know who will win this year’s World Series, but I promise it will be the team with the best complement of players, not the best single athlete. That’s what I like about baseball: teamwork. Blue Skies of Texas came about over 50 years ago because we had great players and teamwork, and it continues today for the same reason.

Gen Curtis LeMay is credited with the idea of a retirement community for widowed spouses, but he had a great complement of players (see page 3). Spurred on by the flagship Officers’ Spouses’ club in Washington, DC, they brought the dream to life on November 3, 1970, when the first resident received her key.

While most of us will not take the field on March 26 with major league baseball, you can take the field that same day with the Blue Skies team and participate in The Big Give. We’re raising funds for a comforting spa bath as part of the current renovation project for Freedom House, our nationally recognized memory care facility.

As you’ll see in this issue of the Courier, our residents are very active, and the staff seems to be matching them stride for stride. This year, we’ll complete construction on our newest homes in The Gardens. The entire neighborhood is excited about the expansion and can’t wait to welcome their new neighbors. We’ll also see the renovation of Freedom House, where memory care residents have received state-of-the-art care and compassion for the last 21 years. In addition, we opened a new secured skilled nursing unit at The Mission to provide skilled nursing level care in a memory care environment for those who need both. There is a lot going on.

Whether you support The Big Give, our annual Play for Freedom Golf Tournament benefiting Freedom House or any of our other charitable opportunities, every penny given goes to the cause you identify. Blue Skies does not use charitable funds for administrative support. Your contributions help provide a safe and secure home for any resident who, through no fault of their own, has outlived their resources.

It is all about teamwork and finding the right team. If you want to be part of a winning team and have the time of your life, come check us out at Blue Skies of Texas.
Air Force Village was founded on a dream of compassion and gratitude for Air Force widows. A core group from the Air Force Officers’ Wives’ Club (OWC) of Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C., envisioned a retirement home for widows in the 1950s, before retirement compensation was provided for military widows and widowers.

Momentum strengthened in 1962 under the brilliant leadership of Helen LeMay, wife of the Air Force Chief of Staff. Looking to the Air Force motto, “Taking Care of Our Own,” the founders recruited support from 350 OWCs. In 1964, General Curtis LeMay formed a board that incorporated the tax-exempt Air Force Foundation (the progenitor of the Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation) and launched active fundraising.

Mrs. LeMay recruited aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran to endorse the project in 1964 and General LeMay invited others to join the campaign. They cheered as $1 million rolled in from OWCs around the world. Dances, rodeos, bingo, fashion shows, cookbook sales – every imaginable grassroots effort supported the cause.

A nationwide search for property led to a site near Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. In 1966, Marmon & Mok designed a high-rise building, community center and 32 garden homes. Construction began May 20, 1969 and for the groundbreaking, soil from 217 Air Force bases from around the world symbolized that this was a place for people from all places, not just Texas.

At the time, Air Force Village was the only retirement community of its kind in the world. In early 1970, Ben Settles was named associate director, and he and his wife Dottie became the inaugural “friendly innkeepers.” On November 3, 1970, General John D. Ryan gave the welcoming address, and the flag officially was raised over the remarkable Air Force Village.

Very soon, 12 pioneering residents, affectionately dubbed “The Dirty Dozen,” were calling Air Force Village “home.” Since opening, the charitable mission has realized its goal by serving over 23,000 residents in need, who now include retirees from all walks of life.

Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation remains the guidepost for the charitable mission, fulfilling the vision of the founders by providing financial support to widows and widowers in need.

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**Did you know?**

- Key founders of Air Force Village placed service above self in creating their vision. They never believed they would one day live here, yet all of them – Hazel Dillingham, Kelly Dixon, Ethel Kuter, Willda Landon, Jane Metcalf, Maude Twining and Connie White – eventually retired here.

- Air Force wives who envisioned Air Force Village saw it as a home for widows, but also hoped couples and WWII widowers would retire in this amazing community.

- Every dollar that built Air Force Village was raised privately without help from the Air Force or any government agency.

(Editor’s note: We are grateful to Blue Skies East resident Anne Bowbeer, who researched and wrote the history of Air Force Village. Her book, *In the Beginning*, is a priceless gift that captures the time span from concept through mid-1985, with stories, quotes, dates and photos.)
When you think of athletes, such superstars as LeBron James, Tom Brady and Jack Nicklaus may spring to mind. But when we think of athletes, we are inspired by Chong and Jasper Sims, Carol and Agapito Hernandez and Verna Howell. These intrepid senior athletes are among the hundreds of Blue Skies residents who cycle, work out, dance, swim and run marathons, and play golf, tennis/pickleball and bocce ball to keep fit. They compete and build strength, flexibility and stamina to live life to the max.

Hope Santos, Life Enrichment Manager, coaches and encourages residents as a personal trainer and teacher, and they in turn inspire her.

Hope says there are so many athletes, she would need an entire Courier to feature them all. Today, we’re saluting an 86-year-old “new” athlete who beautifully illustrates that it’s never too late to try something new!

Verna Howell moved to Blue Skies last summer and though she has feared water all her life, she bravely stepped into the pool and began a twice-weekly regimen in aqua aerobics. She has lost almost 20 pounds (“I had to buy a new swim suit; my old one was falling off of me!”), says she feels “immensely better,” is learning to swim, and plans to begin working out in the gym. “This is the best thing that ever happened to me,” she says. “Blue Skies takes care of us: they feed us, entertain us … and work us!”

Carol Hernandez has been practicing aqua aerobics for three decades. “It’s low impact, benefits your joints and cardio and offers resistance all at once,” she says. Her husband, Agapito, works out in the Blue Skies East Gym, maintaining a lifelong fitness regimen.

He runs at least 10 miles per week, an activity he started while serving in the Air Force, and he enjoys year ‘round golf in San Antonio’s temperate climate. Both have added occasional line dancing to their routines, an exercise they enjoy together. They moved to Blue Skies from the Pacific Northwest and tell us, “The Fitness Center was a key factor in our decision to move here.” They are disciplined, healthy and determined to stay that way. Athletes through and through.

Chong and Jasper Sims are lifelong athletes, and in retirement, this youthful couple has found joy in upping their game, such as participating in CrossFit before arriving at Blue Skies. He has run 5Ks, 10Ks and marathons; she trains with him. They’ve added Zumba, aqua therapy and jogging to their serious workout routine. She practices yoga and he enjoys cycling in the gym. Undeterred by numbers (they’re in their early 70s), they both hop on bikes and cruise around the community, ever on the search for a new adventure. “We work hard to earn our relaxation and naps,” they laugh.

Hope says, “Our athletes inspire each other and recruit friends to join them. A group of 25-30 cyclists routinely bikes 30 miles roundtrip to Castroville for breakfast. We have a 99-year-old who joins group exercise classes and is more limber than most people 20 years younger – that’s one of the benefits of regular exercise! To give you an example of how active and engaged our residents are, we used to have a relaxation/meditation class … but it was too slow for them … they stopped coming!”
When Freedom House opened in August, 1998, the memory care industry declared a resounding, “Wow!” The innovative Freedom House Alzheimer’s Care and Research Center brings together the best practices in the industry to create a safe, comfortable, skilled environment where highly trained staff brings healing, calm and hope to the residents they treat as beloved family.

21 YEARS LATER
Wendy Carpenter, MHA, Chief Health Services Officer, Blue Skies of Texas, says, “Freedom House was a standard-bearer when memory care was in its infancy, and it continues to be a leader. Now we’re 21 years older, and as the beneficiaries of two decades of research, technology advancements and evolved best practices, we’re setting new standards. We’re reinventing memory care with renovations that will enhance life for our residents well into the future.”

INNOVATIONS IN COMFORT & WELL-BEING
★ Interior redesign is creating small, intimate areas in each household where lighting, color schemes and noise abatement will bring emotional comfort to residents who might be distracted by ordinary activities. Research has shown that residents are likely to find tranquility and engage in healthy interaction in such a modified environment.
★ Circadian lighting installations will communicate with normal sleep cycles to reset life rhythms to their natural state. This healing technology benefits sleep patterns and energy and leads to better overall health.
★ Spa-like bathing areas will bring a new level of comfort and safety to residents. Soothing colors, towel warmers and expanded showers complete with waterfall shower-heads and detachable arms will ensure each resident a customizable, safe and peaceful bathing experience.

LANDSCAPING MODIFICATIONS
Landscaping modifications will invite residents outdoors to enjoy the peaceful ambience of nature and fresh air. Increased shaded spaces and reduced glare (which can adversely affect individuals with dementia) will make outdoors more appealing.

CONSTRUCTION SENSITIVITY
Wendy says, “We are fortunate to be working with Leonard Construction, professionals who understand the importance of safety and quiet when working in an occupied space. We close one household at a time to avoid subjecting residents to the clamor. Leonard has walled off construction areas and restricted access – and fortunately, we will not have to move any residents out of Freedom House.”

FREEDOM HOUSE: THE JOURNEY CONTINUES
“The Journey Continues” capital campaign has raised $4.5 million toward its $6 million goal, and continues to seek individual gifts and grants to sustain the Freedom House mission. For information on how you can bring the gift of healing and comfort to our memory care residents, please contact Jennifer Berg, Director of Development, Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation, 210-568-3206 or jenniferberg@blueskiestx.org.

THE BIG GIVE SA: $100,000 GOAL
Your gifts to the Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation during The Big Give SA on March 26, 2020 will cover the building of a “spa bath” for Freedom House. Please join our efforts in this worthy cause! https://www.thebiggivesa.org/organizations/air-force-villages-charitable-foundation
Airplanes and the Blue Skies residents who flew and knew them make up some of the unique collections of photos and art that line the main hallway walls of Blue Skies West, and the hallway by the executive offices at Blue Skies East. You won’t find another collection like these anywhere.

The photographic history at West has been assembled, documented and archived through the collaboration of a team led by historian and former Navy pilot, LCDR Don Jordan, USN (Ret); Jean Sherrill, museum curator and longtime resident; and Lori DeWitt, Resident Services Director at Blue Skies West. With Don’s passion for military history and Jean’s skills as a curator, visitors are able to view sections on Early Aviation; Women in Aviation; WWII: European Theater; WWII: Pacific Theater; Korean War; and Vietnam.

At Blue Skies East, Dave Zeh, Resident Services Director, says the collection is “very personal to our residents who donated these pieces for the enjoyment of all.” On both campuses, the names and careers of residents are noted on the photos to honor their contributions to the U.S. Armed Forces. Several photos are one of a kind.

Blue Skies differs from other active retirement communities in bold and positive ways, and this history is another illustration of that. We invite you to visit us, meet our residents from all backgrounds, and discover the heritage of Blue Skies!

Robert Drelbhis loved to make people laugh. Under the pseudonym “Dreb,” he filled notebooks with his original cartoons, poking fun at anything he deemed worthy. A resident of Air Force Village from 1988 until his death in 2009, his legend lives on through his collection that can be seen in the library at Blue Skies West. This Dreb cartoon invites sponsors and players to support the annual Play for Freedom golf tournament on Friday, May 1 at the Quarry Golf Course to benefit Freedom House.

For more information, contact Michelle Serna, Fundraising Associate, Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation, 210-568-3290 or michelleserna@blueskiestx.org.
Your gifts to the Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation (AFVCF) bring health, security and sustenance to residents who, through no fault of their own, have outlived their resources. Costs of prescription drugs, housing, health care and other essentials have surpassed the ability of some to cover their living expenses.

As you can see to the right, in 2019 AFVCF was able to provide various levels of support to 33 residents, many of whom are Air Force widows … because of you. They, and we, are so grateful.

All donations to the AFVCF are 100% tax-deductible, and because Foundation operating expenses are covered by Blue Skies, Inc., 100% of your gifts are used for charitable work.

No one we know actually enjoys filling out IRS forms, but we do know some smart, tax-savvy folks who make the job easier … and maybe even fun. Amazingly, they do it for free!

Let’s give a round of applause for the AARP VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) teams at Blue Skies. VITA veterans, new volunteers and intake specialists are ready to help residents and Blue Skies employees navigate the IRS 2019 forms and rules. Trained and certified through the national VITA program, these folks bring special skills, along with kind, generous hearts.

Major Allen Wesson, USAF (Ret), who leads the team at Blue Skies West, says it is a rewarding mission for all parties. “Everyone we serve is grateful, especially residents who no longer drive and employees who need a helping hand. We serve about 100 folks each year, and it makes us feel good, too.” Major Hal Elliott, USAF (Ret), heads up the team at Blue Skies East that serves over 100 each year and also finds it gratifying to be of service to others.

The volunteers print out the forms, ensure everything is filled out correctly and then file for their relieved customers. “Residents are so pleased that our services are free,” Maj Elliott says. Blue Skies provides a vacant apartment on each campus for the VITA project, and the IRS provides the computers, printers and forms.

It is time-consuming work that requires patience and skill, and volunteers must participate in a 40-hour initial training, followed by an annual certification test to make sure they’re up to date on tax laws. Why do they do it? “We take care of each other here,” Maj Wesson explains.

It’s another perk to life at Blue Skies, where the charitable mission that guides us is evident in many kind and unexpected ways.
Blue Skies of Texas is an exceptional retirement community with an extraordinary charitable mission – reaching out to the widowed spouses of retired Air Force officers who would like to live in this safe community and may need some financial assistance to do so. Our mission comforts those in need and gives purpose to our community that transcends the ordinary.

If you know of an eligible widow of a retired Air Force officer who might qualify, please call (210) 568-5029 or (210) 568-3282. All assistance is strictly confidential.

OUR MISSION
We will improve lives by providing exceptional retirement living and continuing care with an emphasis on individual quality of life and dignity.

OUR VISION
We will set the standard of excellence in senior lifecare through our relentless pursuit of innovation, service and compassionate care.

Contact Us

Toll-Free
(866) 553-5389

Marketing
(210) 568-3200

Development
(210) 568-3206

Blue Skies East
(210) 673-2761

Blue Skies West
(210) 677-8666

Alzheimer’s Care & Research Center
(210) 838-6300

REFER AN ELIGIBLE AIR FORCE WIDOW

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